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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002639

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL MARR KPAL KWBG IS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS MILITARY RELATIONS](#)

SUBJECT: DEFMIN MOFAZ DISCUSSES ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
NEGOTIATIONS WITH A/S WELCH AND DEPUTY NSA ABRAMS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz; Reasons: 1.4 (B)
and (D).

1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch, Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, Lieutenant General William Ward and the Charge on April 21, Israel's Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said the GOI is taking steps to strengthen Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, but is concerned by what Mofaz termed his ineffectiveness and the lack of progress on security issues. A/S Welch discussed Abbas's views on ways to consolidate his political support, including equipping PA security services, deploying the Badr brigade from Jordan, and releasing prisoners from Israeli jails. Mofaz stressed the difficulties of such actions without progress on security. He said he is coordinating disengagement with PA Minister of Civil Affairs Muhammad Dahlan and dismissed suggestions that Interior Minister Nasir Yusif also has a role. Mofaz stressed the importance of dealing with Palestinian fugitives, saying that Israel is prepared to hand over control of additional towns if this issue is resolved. He was joined in the meeting by MOD Director General Amos Yaron, Director of the MOD's Military-Political Division Amos Gilad and Brigadier General Eitan Dangot. End Summary.

Mofaz: Positive Israeli Moves on Civil Issues ...

2. (C) Mofaz said that the GOI wants to strengthen PA President Mahmud Abbas, but sees him as a well-intentioned -- but thus far ineffective -- "one man show." A/S Welch asked what the GOI had done to respond to the Secretary's request to ease the everyday life for Palestinians. Mofaz replied that he had received a paper from President Abbas listing desired steps, adding, "I believe we will fulfill all of them or most of them." He claimed that COGAT (the MOD's Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories) has been responsive to recent Palestinian requests, i.e., extending hours and beginning night operations at crossing points, granting work permits for Palestinians in Israel, providing freedom of movement for Palestinians VIPs, and easing border-crossing procedures in Gaza. Mofaz insisted that the GOI is "ready to do more" in these areas.

... not Matched by Palestinian Moves on Security

3. (C) Mofaz stressed that the GOI wants to see the PA take parallel moves on the "main issue" of security, but does not believe the Palestinians "have the courage or the power to deal with Hamas or the heads of the terrorist organizations."

In Mofaz's assessment, Palestinian reform of the security services consists of "lots of planning but no results." Deputy NSA Abrams agreed that progress has been slow, but noted the significance of President Abbas's intention to retire many senior PA commanders. Mofaz cautioned that terrorist groups have gained strength since the IDF pulled back from Palestinian towns. He said that the PA is not moving quickly enough to implement the Sharm al-Shaykh agreement and build trust, a claim he supported with a list of the 271 Palestinian attacks that took place following the Sharm al-Shaykh summit. He also noted what he called the PA's inability, despite orders from President Abbas, to stop the firing of over 100 mortar rounds at Gush Katif on April

9. Mofaz warned that a repetition of these attacks or similar major event "could stop all of the dialogue between us and the Palestinians," endanger disengagement, and necessitate IDF action in Gaza.

4. (C) In response to a question by Deputy NSA Abrams, Mofaz said the GOI had provided threat information and names of terrorists to the Palestinians, but such steps had not resulted in any action. He claimed that when Israel identified the individual responsible for smuggling four surface-to-air missiles into Gaza, the PA had warned the suspect but made no arrest. According to Mofaz, one PA security force uncovers smuggling tunnels while another (military intelligence) does the smuggling.

Palestinian Requests

15. (C) A/S Welch told Mofaz that during a meeting on April 20 President Abbas had listed three steps that would assist him to consolidate political support: equipping the PA security services with weapons, ammunition, and Russian APCs; deploying the Badr brigade from Jordan; and -- most importantly -- releasing additional prisoners from Israeli jails. Mofaz replied that all three issues could only be addressed by the cabinet. He stressed that he would not recommend allowing the PA to import new weapons, reiterating his belief that the Palestinians suffer from structural, not logistical, deficits. General Ward noted that the GOI and PA appear to be stuck in a "do loop" construct, or vicious circle, whereby the Israelis claim they cannot assist the PA until the PA action on security and the Palestinians claim they cannot take action until they receive assistance.

16. (C) Mofaz insisted that the Badr brigade would become "part of the anarchy" if removed from direct control of the Jordanian forces. He said that he had asked the Jordanians to consider training PA personnel instead, noting that any outside interference would merely relieve the PA's security forces from responsibility and further complicate the reform process. On prisoners, Mofaz claimed he had pushed hard for 900 releases in two stages. He expressed confidence that the last 400 of these prisoners would eventually be released, but noted that the problems with fugitives and the recent barrage of mortar attacks made it difficult for the GOI to make concessions.

17. (C) A/S Welch asked Mofaz whether it would be accurate to say that the GOI has already taken certain steps, is planning others, but implementation depends upon Palestinian actions. Admitting that "I hope we have better news in the next meeting," Mofaz offered the more positive assessment that the GOI continues to take new steps to ease restrictions on the Palestinians. He added that he still believes that "there is a chance to move forward with the Palestinians," and called the PA's willingness to coordinate disengagement the "main test."

18. (C) A/S Welch categorized security reform and coordination of disengagement as the two key tests facing the PA. He noted that on April 20 PA officials had discussed their plans for security reform and for assuming responsibility for Gaza settlements and for the four West Bank settlements that will be vacated by Israel as part of the disengagement plan. The Palestinians also appeared more organized in their other plans for disengagement than they earlier appeared, he said. A/S Welch and Deputy NSA Abrams mentioned that Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement James Wolfensohn would arrive in Israel on May 2 to coordinate non-security aspects of the process.

GOI Coordinating Disengagement with Dahlan

19. (C) Mofaz acknowledged that the Palestinians now understand that they should coordinate disengagement. He said that he would discuss security issues with PA Minister of Civil Affairs Muhammad Dahlan late on April 21, while Vice PM Shimon Peres would meet with PM Ahmad Quraya' on civil issues. General Ward and Deputy NSA Abrams urged the GOI to also work with Interior Minister Nasir Yusif, noting that a failure to deal with the MOI might undermine Yusif. Mofaz demurred, maintaining that the PA had designated Dahlan as the coordinator, that Dahlan could include whomever he wanted to on his team, and that the GOI must focus its efforts on the individuals capable of producing results. Mofaz claimed that Yusif has never produced results and does not command the allegiance of security personnel in Gaza.

Fugitive Issue Key to Progress on Handover of Cities

10. (C) Mofaz stressed the importance of dealing with Palestinian fugitives, saying that Israel is prepared to hand over control of additional towns if this issue is resolved. He insisted that first Dahlan, and later President Abbas and Yusif, had agreed that the fugitives would disarm, cease terrorist activity, place themselves under PA supervision, and remain in their current locations. Mofaz complained that the PA is integrating the fugitives into the Palestinian security services, stressing that the PA could not expect the terrorists of yesterday to be in charge of security today. He cautioned that if the fugitives continue to be involved with terrorist activities, "we will target them." General Ward asked about the status of joint Palestinian and Israeli efforts to resolve this issue. Mofaz replied that he and Dahlan would address the issue on April 21.

11. (U) A/S Welch and Deputy NSA Abrams have cleared this message.

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